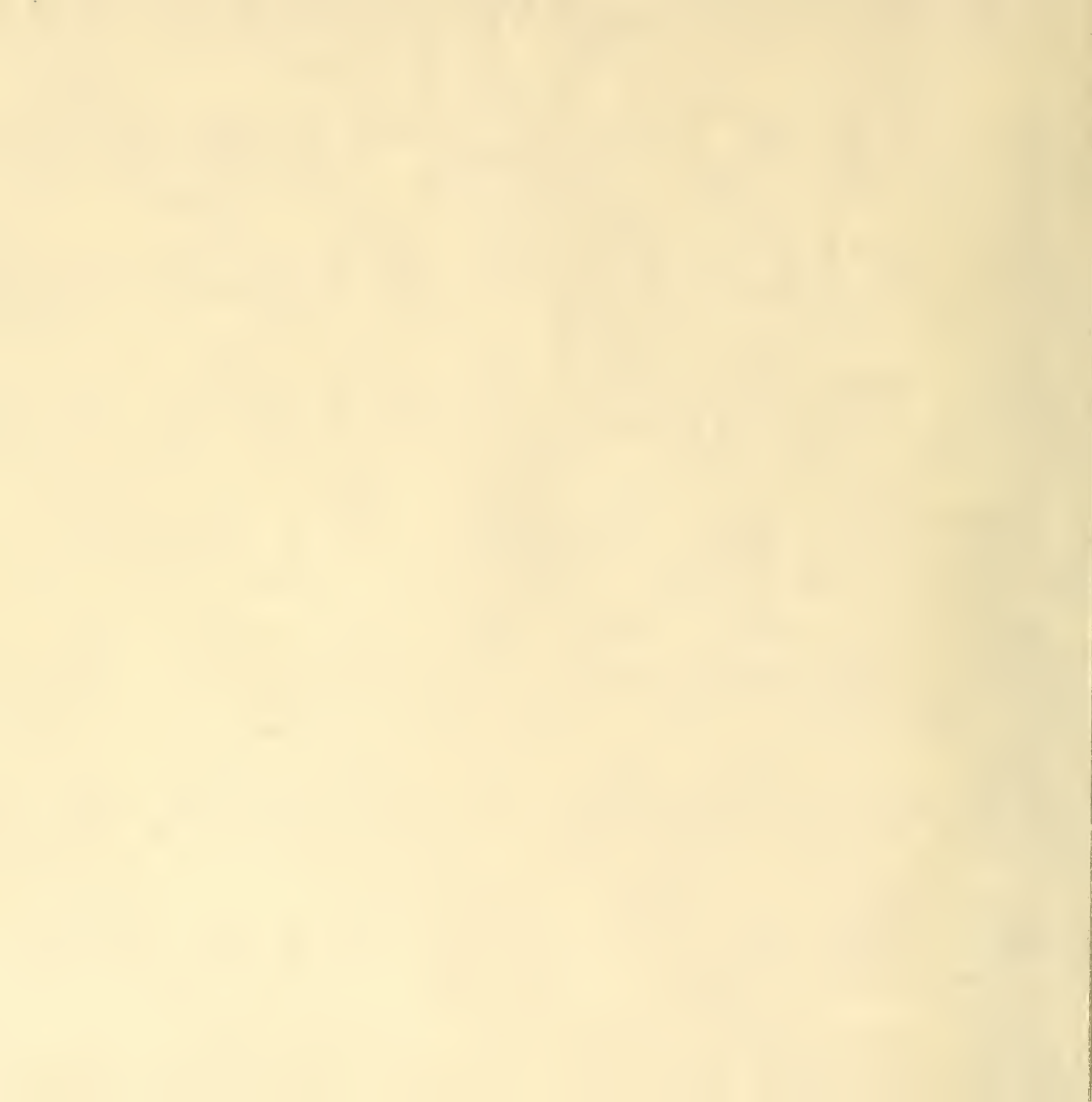


WESTERN  
EUROPEAN EMBROIDERY

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# Western European Embroidery

in the Collection of  
the Cooper-Hewitt  
Museum



The Smithsonian  
Institution's National  
Museum of Design

**Man's Cap**

*England, late 16th century*

*Foundation: linen, plain weave. Split and back stitch using silk. Couched metal-wrapped silk with silk of various colors used for couching. Spangles attached. Some clouds and rainbows separately embroidered on linen and attached.*

*Bequest of Richard C. Greenleaf in memory of his mother, Adeline Emma Greenleaf, 1962-53-11*

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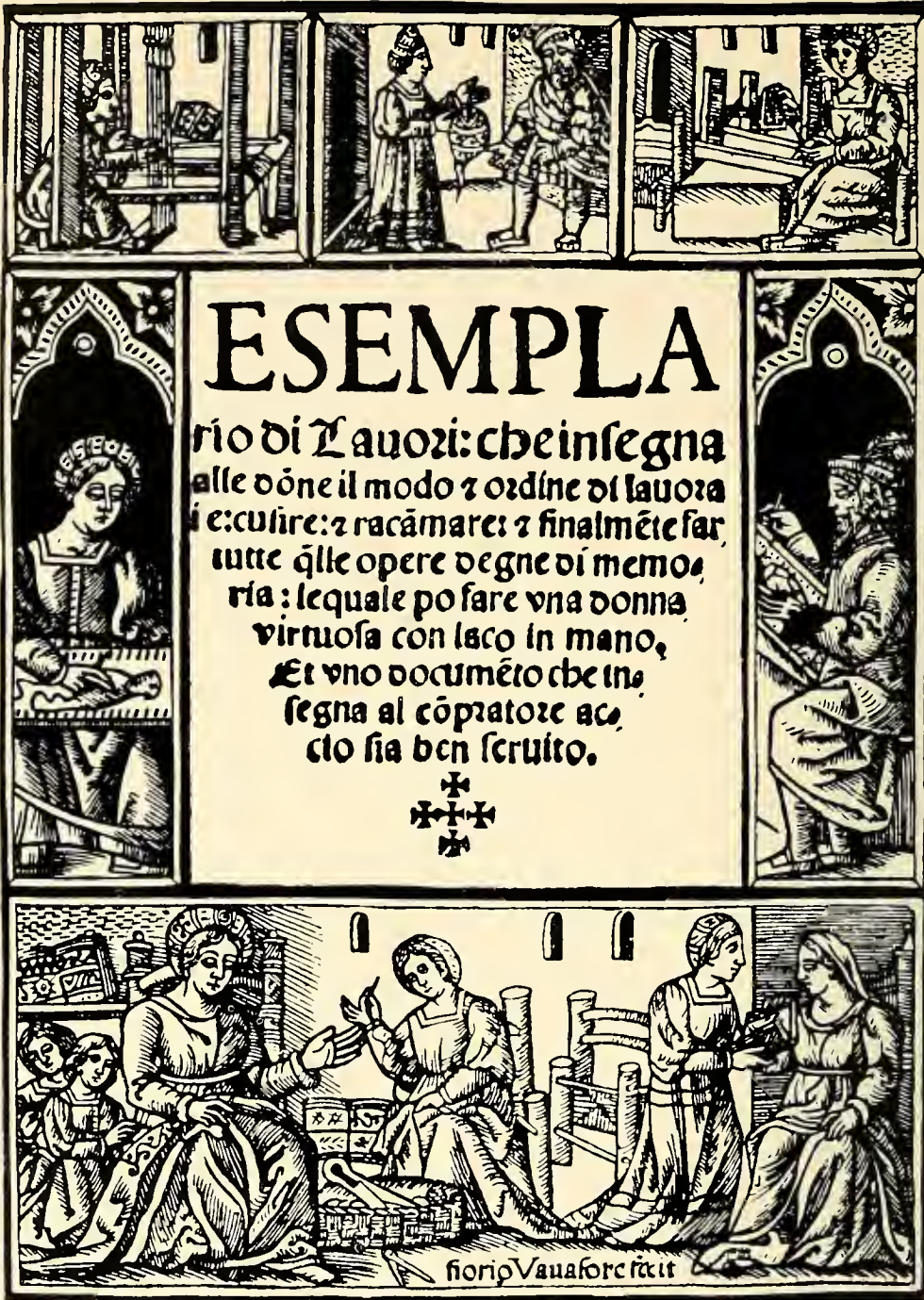
**Western  
European  
Embroidery**

in the Collection of  
the Cooper-Hewitt  
Museum /

Cooper-Hewitt  
Museum of  
Decorative Arts  
And design

The Smithsonian  
Institution's National  
Museum of Design

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Title page from Vavassore, Giovanni, *Esemplario di Lavoro* 1530



## Foreword

The collections that Eleanor and Sarah Hewitt amassed for the school started by their grandfather, Peter Cooper, have long been recognized in scholarly circles. In public eyes, however, they are regarded as "the best kept secret in New York." With the move of the collections from the Cooper Union to the Carnegie Mansion, they are available at last to wider audiences. Thus, each year, several collections that normally rest in study centers will be put on temporary display. To accompany these exhibitions, the Museum will publish small catalogues describing its holdings in the subject areas presented.

Because of the current revival of interest in embroidery of all kinds, the first publication in this series is devoted to Western European Embroideries in the Cooper-Hewitt Museum. Although the catalogue includes only a sampling of the many hundreds of embroidered items in the collection, it provides a good introduction to the various techniques used in embroidery, and describes the historical development of embroidery in this part of the world.

The formidable task of documenting the entire Cooper-Hewitt Collection will take many years. We are deeply grateful to the Embroidery Council of America for enabling us to launch the series by underwriting the printing of this first publication.

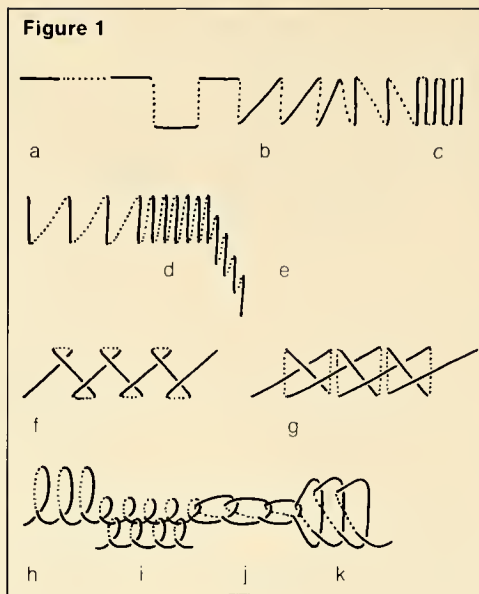
**Lisa Taylor**  
**Director**

Embroidery is the decorative attachment of needle-worked stitches to a previously made foundation. It undoubtedly developed from utilitarian uses of stitches, such as the seaming together of edges of two fabrics or skins, the reinforcing of raw edges of fabrics, or the repairing of holes and tears.

Several notable features of embroidery help explain its popularity among widely differing groups of people. There is no limitation to pattern in embroidery such as there is to pattern produced by a loom. Embroidery stitches can be worked by one person for self-enjoyment or by a group of people for commercial gain. Stitches are easy to learn, the necessary equipment is technologically simple and quality depends more on the embroiderer's innate and acquired skills than on expensive materials. The word embroidery connotes spare time, social position and relative wealth. Through the ownership and display of embroidery, monarchs, artisans and farmers have expressed pride and position within a social structure.

A fundamental understanding of the kinds of stitches employed in embroidery enhances enjoyment of the work beyond the first simply visual reaction. The formation of stitches requires specific movements of hand and needle: the circular movement of "overcasting" to bind edges; the continuously forward movement of "running" stitch to seam; or the back and forth movement of "running" stitch to darn. These stitches are decorative as well as functional. A stitch can be identified by the relationship of portions of the element or yarn to each other and to the foundation into which it is worked. Although the stitches are endlessly variable, their specific movements can be described and the various parts of composite stitches can be isolated.

Simple stitches can be classified as belonging to one of three groups: *flat*, *looped* or *knotted*. Flat stitches are those in which the thread is carried straight from one point to another, in and out of the foundation. The location of these points can be changed so the stitches may or may not be parallel to each other. Stitches may overlap or cross. If, in the sequence of a yarn entering and exiting the foundation fabric the yarn is forced out of its straight passage, the stitch can be described as looped. The basic form of looping is commonly known as "buttonhole" stitch. Knotted stitches appear as a protruberance



**2. Part of an Altar Cloth**  
 Lower Saxony, Germany,  
 14th century  
 Foundation: linen, plain  
 weave. Stitches using linen  
 and silk: stem, satin,  
 surface satin and couching.  
 Height: 12½ inches. Width:  
 12½ inches.  
 Purchase in memory of  
 Elizabeth Haynes, 1949-7-1



on the surface of the foundation fabric, often as a knot in the looped stitch. They are known by such names as "French," "Peking" or "bullion" knots.

The movements of hand and needle while forming flat and looped stitches, and the relationships of various parts of the yarn, are variable and fascinating to observe. For example, compare the straight forward motion of "running" stitch (Figure 1,a) with the simple change in the angle of the stitch to produce "half cross" (Figure 1,b) and with the close alignment of the stitches to produce "surface satin" (Figure 1,c). Compare the in-and-out circular motion of "overcasting" and "satin" (Figure 1,d) with the offset alignment of "stem", "split" and "back" stitches (Figure 1,e). The circling back movement is combined with a crossing of the yarn in both "herringbone" (Figure 1,f) and "long-armed cross" (Figure 1,g).

The hand/needle motion required for looped stitches is circular but when the needle comes out of the foundation fabric it must come up and over the yarn to make a loop before it exits into the foundation. Buttonhole looping (Figure 1,h) can be worked in single rows or on the vertical with a left/right alternation as in "feather" stitch. It can also be worked back into previous rows to fill a shape (Figure 1,i). Chain (Figure 1,j) is a looped stitch in which the yarn's exit and entry are at or near the same point. There are numerous variations based on the spacing of exit and entry points such as "ladder chain" (Figure 1,k).

It should be understood that simple stitches can be combined, interworking with or on top of each other. Stitches can also be interworked to form structures that are detached from the foundation. For example, running stitch worked over and under a set of previously laid flat stitches can produce plain weave or twill in detached interlacing. Buttonhole looping worked back into loops of a previous row produces a distinctive looped structure. Detached stitches can be padded or stuffed to stand out in relief.

The relationship of a stitch to a foundation fabric can be described as counted or uncounted. Counted stitches interwork with the grid-like character of the foundation. The foundation can be a fine to coarse plain weave, plain weave with spaced groups of warps and wefts or any other specially made mesh-like structure such as gauze weave, knotting, crochet or knitting.

**3. Baptism of St. Martin**  
*Franco-Flemish, 1425-35*  
Foundation: two layers of  
linen plain weave. Split and  
stem stitches using silk.  
Couched metal-wrapped  
silk. Couching silk changes  
color and produces  
patterns and textures.  
Diameter: 7 inches  
Gift of Irwin Untermyer,  
1962-8-1a



Counted embroideries generally are geometric in appearance. Uncounted stitches freely form the shapes and contours of the pattern without relating to the structure of the foundation. Counted and uncounted stitches can be used on the same fabric. Several stitches, such as cross, stem and herringbone, are particularly well suited to counting although practically all stitches can be worked counted or uncounted.

Several openwork techniques use counted stitches in special ways. In "deflected element work" for example, the warps and wefts of a woven foundation are forced out of alignment by a tightly pulled stitch. Overcasting, cross and herringbone stitches are commonly used. In "withdrawn element work" selected warps and/or wefts of a woven foundation are removed and the remaining elements form the foundation for stitches. The grid of remaining elements can be overcast or secured by buttonhole stitch and in turn form a foundation for cross stitch or for interlacing or looping. In its most extreme form, large groups of elements are removed leaving a sparse grid of foundation elements; the open space is then filled with needle lace. This technique, known as *reticella*, is marginally related to embroidery.

Functional stitching is as old as man but no one knows exactly when man began to embellish surfaces with embroidery. All the techniques of embroidery have a long history, although at times certain techniques and stitches were more favored than others. The skill of the embroiderer has also fluctuated throughout the ages. Such changes can be documented in the collection of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum which has been acquiring embroidery since its opening as The Cooper Union Museum in 1897.

Through the generosity of a number of collectors and by judicious purchases, Cooper-Hewitt has assembled a wide range of small-scale embroideries, primarily from Western Europe. The collection also includes embroideries from the Near East, India, Central Asia, Indonesia and the Far East, all of which expand the range of techniques and styles and provide comparisons with those from Europe. The most important are those from Mediterranean and Near Eastern Islamic countries, from the fifteenth century and earlier, in which techniques and patterns that influenced Europe can be found. The

#### 4. Picture or Book Cover

France or Germany, 16th century

Foundation: silk, plain weave in central medallion and 5-harness satin in borders. Satin stitch and couching using silk.

Couched metal-wrapped silks sometimes padded or fully 3-dimensional. Coils of wire, coils of flat metal strips and coral beads attached.

Height: 13½ inches. Width: 11½ inches.

Gift of Marian Hague, 1959-144-1



majority of items in the collection are those which were kept in churches, monasteries, royal palaces and households of landowners and tradesmen.

Because of the special way the church used and treasured embroideries, a remarkable number of early ecclesiastical pieces have survived and are preserved in European and American collections. The earliest ecclesiastical work in the Cooper-Hewitt dates from the fourteenth century. One, a small fragment of an orphrey showing Mary and Christ, embroidered with silk and metallic (1963-70-3), is closely related in style and technique to embroideries from the commercial studio of Geri Lapi in Florence. His composition and drawing is in the high style of fourteenth century Italy. The other fourteenth century piece, a twelve-inch linen square, embroidered with linen and silk showing the Crucifixion is from Lower Saxony, Germany (Figure 2). The strong drawing, stark composition and bold decoration of the stitched patterns identify this as the work of a confined order of nuns working in a convent set apart from the main stream of late Gothic Art.

So great was the mastery of technique achieved by professionals in Gothic and early Renaissance workshops of Northern Europe that their embroideries were called "needlepainting." The style is represented in the collection by five Franco-Flemish roundels, each seven inches in diameter. Two of the roundels, produced between 1425 and 1435, illustrate events in the life of St. Martin (Figure 3); the other three roundels, produced between 1432 and 1450, show events in the life of St. Catherine (1962-8-1 c,d,e). The minute faces, embroidered with silk in split stitch, convey deep emotion and power. Of particular interest is the use of couched metal-wrapped silk yarns. Couching is a technique in which a thread is laid across the surface of a fabric and is secured by tiny stitches of a second thread. The silk couching thread in these roundels is spaced to suggest woven or mosaic patterns and a variety of other textures and materials. It also changes color to suggest depth.

A tour-de-force in naturalism and three-dimensional form is represented by a picture with a tree in full foliage dominating the landscape (Figure 4). It may have been embroidered as a special commission for a royal patron in France or Germany in the sixteenth century. The branches of the tree are a fully rounded and stuffed variation of

#### 5. Border for a Table Cover

Italy, early 17th century  
Foundation: linen, plain weave. Counted back and stem stitches using silk. Trimmed with silk bobbin lace. Repeat width: 13½ inches. Height: 8 inches  
Greenleaf in memory of his mother, Adeline Emma Greenleaf, 1962-52-3



#### 6. Border for a Table Cover

Italy, early 17th century  
Foundation: linen, plain weave. Back and long-armed cross stitches using silk. Linen bobbin lace attached. Height: 6½ inches. Width: 29½ inches  
Bequest of Richard C. Greenleaf in memory of his mother, Adeline Emma Greenleaf, 1962-52-2

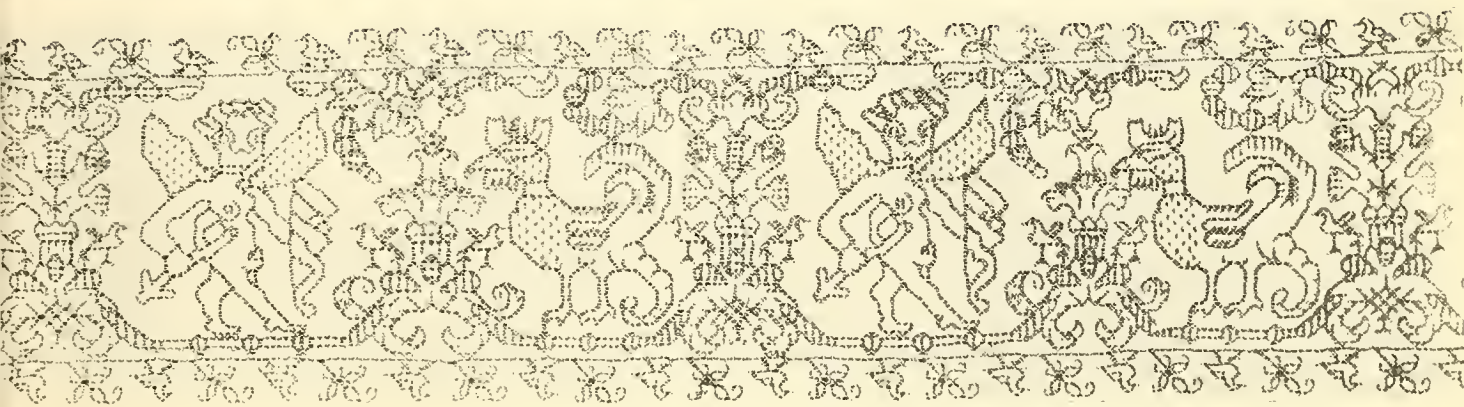


#### 7. Band

Italy, late 16th or early 17th century.  
Foundation: linen, plain weave. Back and running stitches using silk. Repeat width: 4¼ inches. Height: 2¼ inches  
Purchase, Anonymous Funds, 1949-64-8







couched metallic yarns. The leaves are bent shapes of metal-wrapped silk and stand out in mid-air. The salamander at the base of the tree and the crutches and leg-like ornaments hanging from the tree seem to suggest rejuvenation.

A significant factor in the cultural development in sixteenth century Western Europe was the rise of the non- and semi-professional needleworker. Their emergence was the result of a combination of forces, including the printing and distribution of books, the Reformation in Germany and in England, the rise in economic power of European nations, and the increased availability of luxury goods—among them silk and metallic yarns for embroidery.

The first known pattern book was printed in Augsburg, Germany in about 1523. By 1590 books of the same type also appeared in Italy, France and England. The books are summaries of popular ornament rather than the designs of an individual artist. The designs are drawn from Greek and Roman antiquity, Gothic ornament, arabesques and natural motifs from Islamic cultures around the Mediterranean and patterns copied from other books and prints. The books, which provide no directions for stitches, are in black and white with occasional suggestions of tone. Some patterns suggest counted work while others are clearly for free-form embroidery. The patterns were used by weavers and lace makers as well as embroiderers.

The majority of patterns were intended for borders of table covers, towels and clothing. The most popular border was a floral vine. In the 1520's and 1530's strong Islamic influences appeared in the pattern books. In the early seventeenth century, elaborate curving vines ended in dragon heads and human busts and twisting branches provided shelter for insects and birds (Figure 5). Other subjects which appeared in pattern books include human figures, animals, birds, processions, the alphabet and geometric patterns.

Embroideries from Italy, Spain, Portugal and England, in styles found in pattern books, form an extensive and important part of the Cooper-Hewitt collection. The majority are from the gifts and bequests of Richard C. Greenleaf and Marian Hague, long-time friends of the museum. Of particular interest are the bands from the Greenleaf collection that illustrate episodes from the Old Testament (Figure 6).

## **8. Ecclesiastical Cover with symbols of the passion**

*Italy, late 16th or early  
17th century*

*Foundation: linen, plain  
weave. Withdrawn element  
work with overcasting.*

*Cross stitch using silk.  
Patch of knotted net with  
pattern darning. Height:  
32½ inches. Width: 30½  
inches*

*Bequest of Marian Hague,  
1971-50-562*

*Similar to a pattern in de  
Sera, Dominique—Le livre  
de lingerie (Paris, 1584)*

DOMINUS VOBIS SCIENTIBUS

ANNO DOMINI MDCCLXXXIII

ANNO DOMINI MDCCLXXXIII



INSCRIBIT DOMINI NOSTRI

A number of bands from Italy, Spain and Portugal have a wide variety of stitches using silk and metal-wrapped silk yarns. By the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries metallic yarns were widely used, as can be documented in portrait painting as well as by a close study of the embroideries themselves. Satin stitch, increasingly favored in this period, left a great deal of expensive yarn unseen on the reverse side and an effort was made to build shapes in relief using metallic yarns. A cupid in a chariot drawn by a unicorn (1962-120-5) and fantastic dragons (1949-64-16) illustrates this type.

Although it is unusual to match an embroidery with a published pattern, several such comparisons can be made in the Cooper-Hewitt collection thanks to the efforts of Marian Hague. For example, a band with the slogan "Liberta" (1971-50-92) relates to a pattern published by Giovanni Vavasore in Italy in 1530; a towel embroidered at both ends with Cupid pointing a spear at a reclining nude woman (1971-50-563) was based on a plate from the book published by Mathio Pagano in Venice in 1558; and a towel end with a floral band (1942-7-16) relates to an illustration in Domenico da Sera's book published in Paris in 1584.

Ecclesiastical embroidery in England, where top quality church furnishings were produced for an international market in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, came to a sudden and violent end in the sixteenth century. Under the reign of Henry VIII monasteries and churches were looted and the clergy murdered. Those vestments and church furnishings which were not wantonly destroyed or burnt to reclaim their gold content, found their way into royal and private collections where they were often re-used. These splendid fabrics, lavishly embellished with silks and metallics once reserved for the church fathers, suddenly had a wider audience—one which appreciated their quality and quickly grasped the concept of pride in ownership and display. English portraits from the period of Henry VIII and particularly from the reign of Elizabeth I illustrate an extravagance of silk, metallics, spangles, beads and precious stones combined with brightly colored brocades, rich velvets and intricate laces. Homes which demanded the comfort provided by bed curtains, wall hangings, pillows and table covers were made more inviting by embroidery. English domestic needlework is represented in the

#### **9. Woman's Cap**

*England, about 1600*

*Foundation: linen, plain weave. Chain and satin stitches using linen.*

*Detached looping using metal-wrapped silk.*

*Withdrawn element work with overcasting and looping. Cut work with needle lace fillings.*

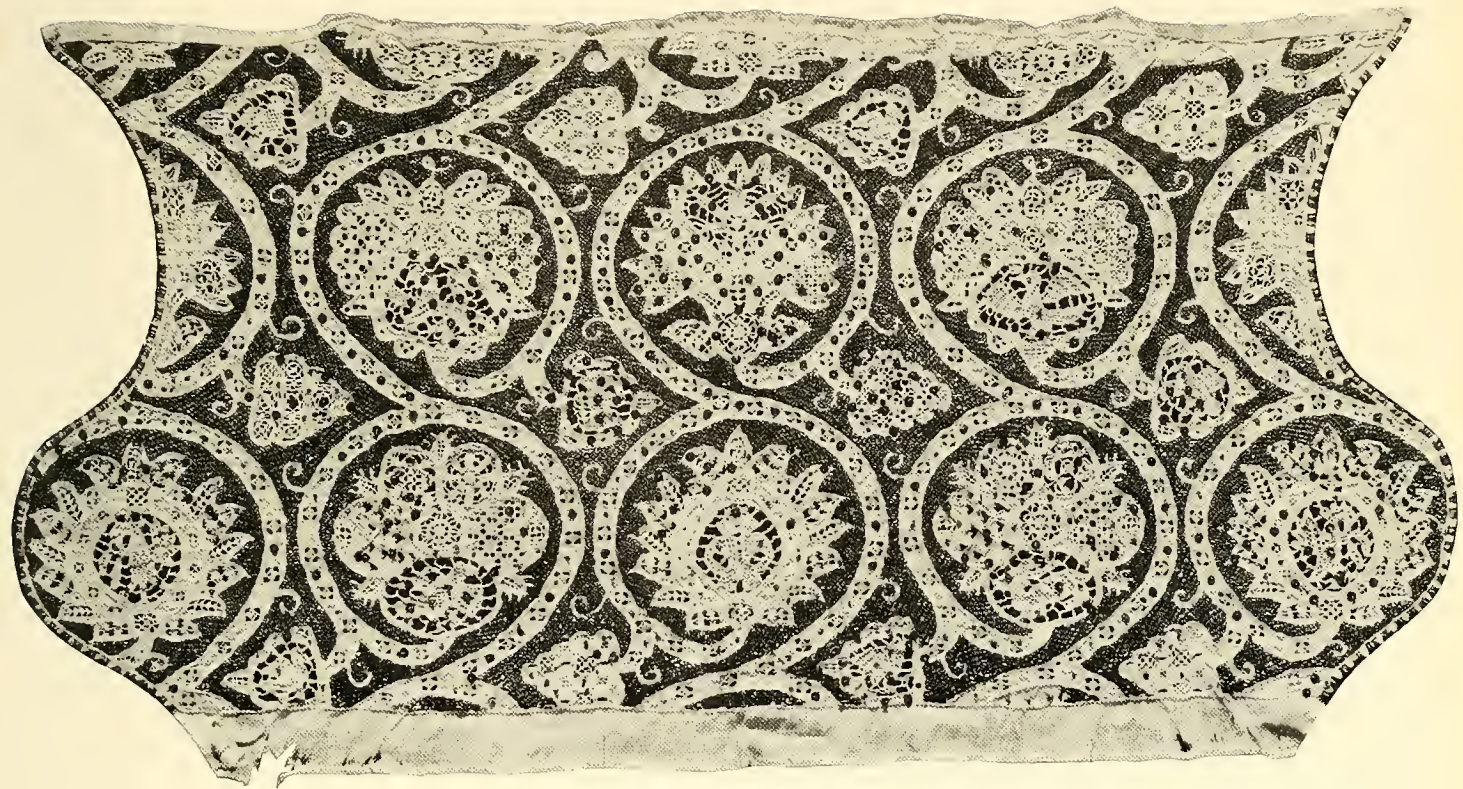
*Spangles secured by a loop of linen threaded through a coil of a flat strip of metal.*

*Height: 9¾ inches. Width: 18½ inches*

*Bequest of Richard C.*

*Greenleaf in memory of his mother Adeline Emma*

*Greenleaf, 1962-53-1*



collection by a man's late sixteenth century dome-shaped cap (cover illustration) and by six women's caps (1962-53-1 through 6). The man's cap is patterned with brightly colored rainbows and with clouds hovering over gold snails and caterpillars. The woman's caps (Figure 9) are veritable gardens with curving vines enclosing flowers, fruit, birds and insects. The number of stitches and the care with which they were worked attest to the passion for embroidery in England during this period. Motifs often echoed the popular patterns of expensive and highly prized drawloom woven fabrics.

Pictures were embroidered for home decoration (Figure 10). The Bible was a frequent source for subjects, as in the unfinished picture "Rebecca at the Well" (1962-50-10) after an engraving by Gerard de Jode published in Antwerp in 1585. Among the most admired English pictures of the seventeenth century are those in which brightly colored flowers and human figures stand out in relief. Images were built up by looping, raised above the foundation fabric, and some motifs were stuffed with yarn or fiber.

Anxious to record patterns for future reference, a needleworker of the sixteenth century embroidered notes or sample patterns on a square of linen. These "samplers" were consulted when projects were planned and they were avidly collected and passed from one generation to another. Samplers reveal the taste of a specific time as well as the technical skill of the embroiderer. The nucleus of the Museum's sampler collection was put together by Eva Johnson Coe. All European styles are included, as well as samplers from those countries influenced by Europe, such as Mexico (Figure 11), Morocco and the United States.

The earliest European sampler in the collection was embroidered in Spain in the sixteenth century. It is a very good example of sampler making, for it consists of snatches of twenty-five different patterns in at least nine stitches.

The shape of a sampler often has much to say about its date and country of origin. English samplers of the seventeenth century were usually long and narrow; measuring as little as six inches in width and as much as three feet in length. There are several seventeenth century English samplers in the collection. Some are the type known as "spot" samplers with isolated flowers and

#### 10. Jephtha's Daughter

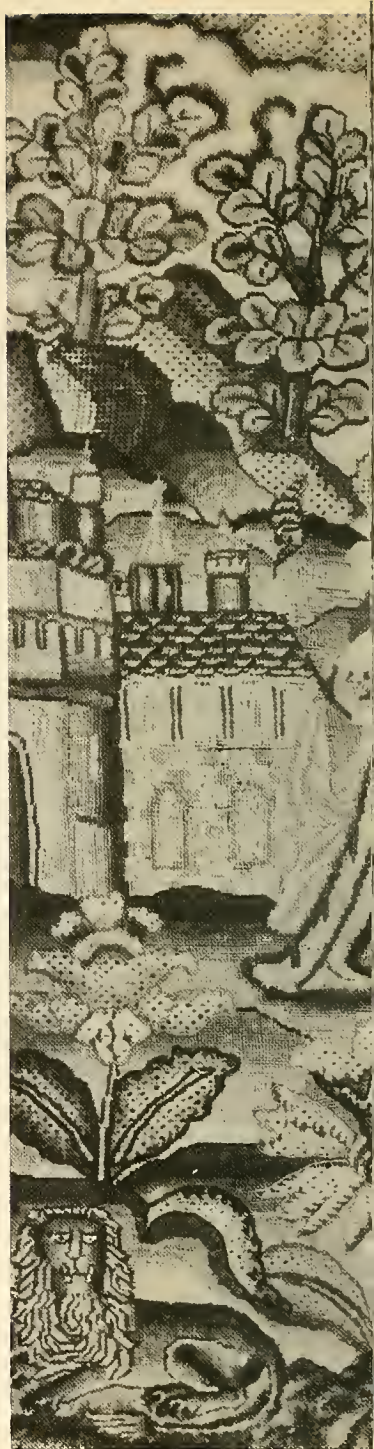
England, 17th century.

Foundation: linen, plain weave. Cousted stitches using silk: stem, cross, padded satin and tightly pulled rococo to deflect foundation elements.

Couched silk, silk-wrapped silk, silk-wrapped wire and loops of silk-wrapped silk.

Height: 16 inches. Width: 20 1/2 inches

Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1951-34-1





repeating patterns embroidered in a large variety of stitches using silk and metallic yarns. English samplers of this period were frequently embroidered entirely in white, with bands of *reticella*, an influence of Italian embroidery.

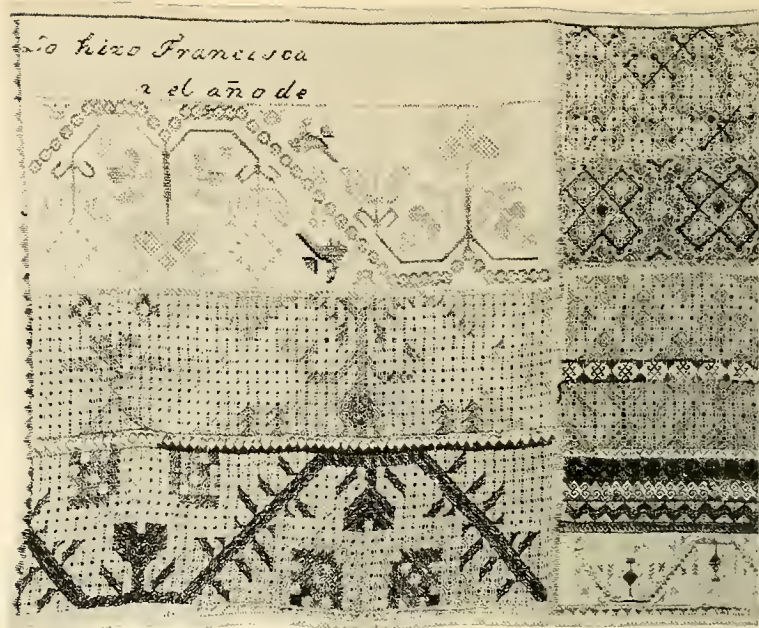
Spanish samplers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were large squares, up to three feet, which could be viewed from each of the four sides. The samplers were often signed with the names of both the pupil and the teacher. German samplers of the same period were made in both rectangular and square shapes.

As pattern books became available, the sampler was no longer needed to record a variety of patterns. Thus its function changed to become a means of perfecting embroidery skills. Literary references indicate that in the seventeenth century samplers were made by children in schools. A repertoire of motifs, such as flowering plants, confronted birds, pyramid-shaped trees, Adam and Eve and angels, developed (Figure 12).

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the variety of stitches used on samplers decreased. Counted cross stitch was the most frequently used, so much so that it became associated with the entire genre and was called the sampler stitch. The specialty sampler, such as the pattern-darning sampler, the marking sampler, and the hollie point sampler (a needle lace technique) appeared during this period.

The museum has several pattern darning samplers embroidered in the Netherlands in the eighteenth century. Their function was to train the embroiderer to darn well enough to mend household linens in various weaves as well as to mend knitting. The sampler was made by filling in a hole cut in the foundation fabric with stitches that re-create or simulate various woven structures. The German marking sampler of the nineteenth century grew out of a similar household tradition of training the embroiderer to personalize and identify the household linens.

American samplers developed from forms and traditions that already existed in Europe. New England samplers are similar to English and Scottish styles while Pennsylvania samplers tend to derive from German traditions. Many American samplers were made in schools where a teacher created the design which her pupils embroidered. Thus several samplers,

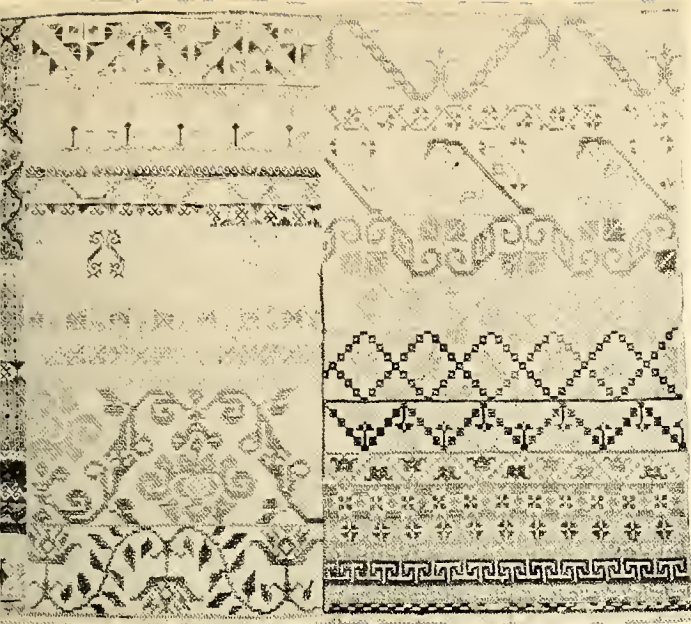


### 11. Sampler

Mexico, late 18th or early 19th century

Foundation: linen, plain weave. Counted stitches using silk: long-armed cross, back, satin and double running. Withdrawn element work with overcasting combined with a long floating stitch (aztec stitch) using silk  
Height: 14½ inches.  
Width: 35 inches  
Bequest of Mrs. Henry E. Coe, 1941-69-122





### 12. Sampler

Jean Porter

England, May 14, 1709-

April 6, 1710

Foundation: linen, plain weave. Counted stitches using silk: long-armed cross, herringbone and double running. Free-form stitches using silk:

detached looping (man's pants), buttonhole (woman's caps and collars) and couching (outline of man's body).

Height: 18½ inches. Width: 9 inches

Bequest of Mrs. Henry E.

Coe, 1941-69-63



identical except for the embroiderer's names, are preserved in different collections.

Crewel wool, worked on linen and cotton, was one of the most popular materials for embroidery in England, France and the United States in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The wool yarn was made from a specially selected long fiber, carefully combed, tightly spun and plied so it would slip easily through the foundation fabric. Because only long and glossy wool fibers were selected, the colors are brilliant even today. England excelled in the production of crewel wool. The most intimate pieces of crewel in the collection are the eighteenth century French men's caps (1944-1-1) and (1952-47-3) and the eighteenth century American woman's petticoat border (Figure 13). The few large hangings in the Museum's collection are very worn and faded due to hard use and exposure to light but the patterns of vines with exotic flowers and leaves are typically vital and full of movement (Figure 14).

In the second half of the seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth century, colorful, brightly dyed and embroidered cottons from India and painted and embroidered silks from China were available for hangings, bed covers and apparel. In spite of the number of exotic foreign fabrics in Europe, for several decades embroidery retained its hold on quality of design and technique. The color, scale and design of silk-embroidered cottons and linens, particularly in England, are closely related to the imports from India.

Foreign trade continued to make available a great range of fabrics in addition to those printed or woven in Europe. Since fabric patterns, particularly for dresses, changed yearly, interest in market developments preoccupied many more people than before. Non-professional embroidery became increasingly less fashionable. Those with money preferred purchasing commercially produced embroideries to doing their own needlework at home.

The work of professional embroiderers in the eighteenth century is represented by a variety of fabrics used by women. A white-on-white fan leaf (1962-50-318) and a pair of lappets or head ornaments (1962-50-56) embroidered in Denmark or Germany, represent efforts of lace needle workers to compete with a growing passion for gossamer bobbin lace in the 1720's and 1730's. Such very personal small-scale pieces are startlingly fine and combine

### 13. Petticoat Border

United States, 18th century

Foundation: linen, plain

weave. Stitches using

crewel wool: stem,

speckling, roumanian, knot,

chain, surface satin and

buttonhole. Height: 7½

inches

Purchase: Funds provided

by Mrs. Montgomery Hare,

Mrs. Alastair B. Martin and

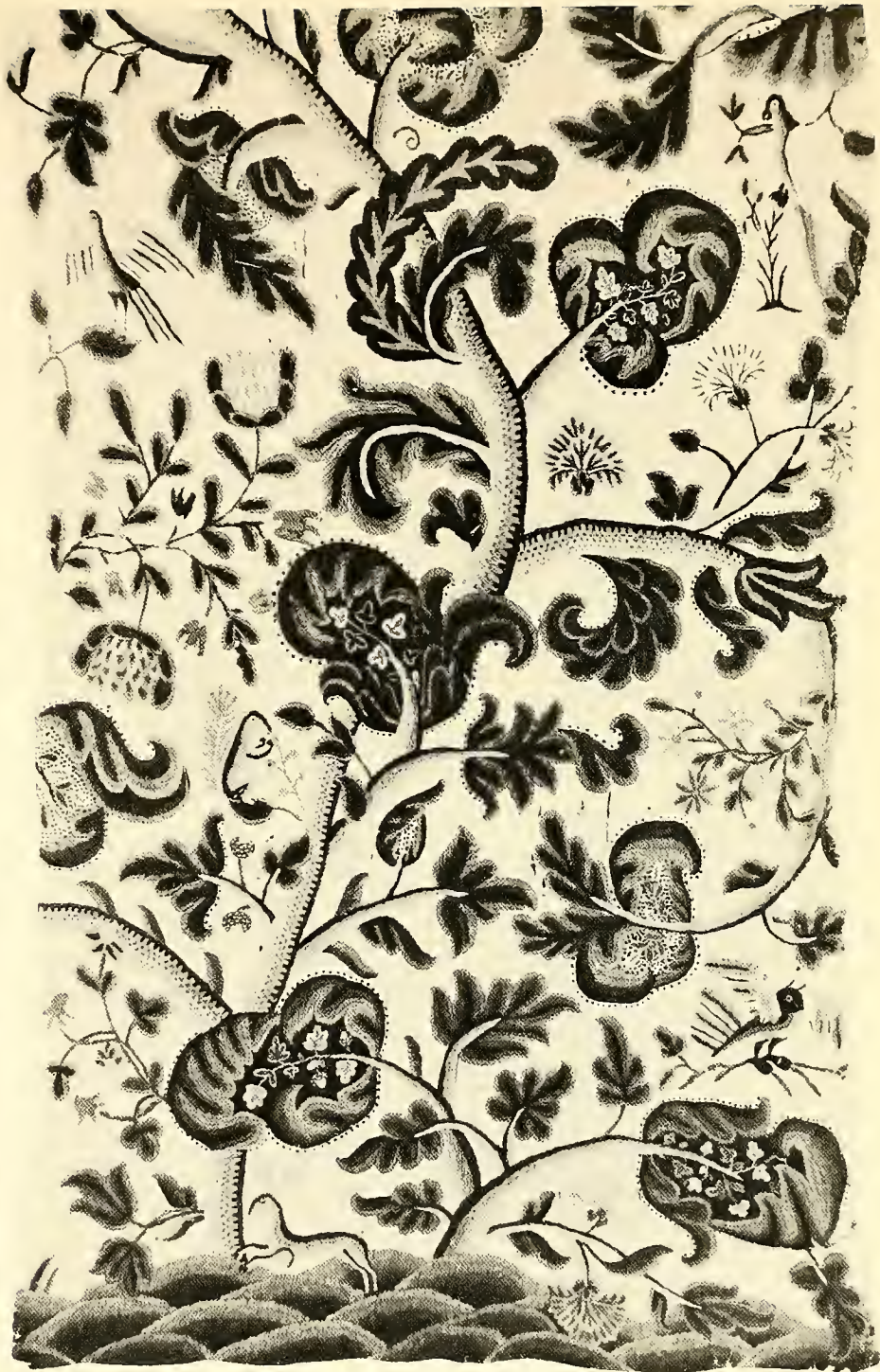
Au Panier Fleuri Fund,

1961-7-1



**14. Hanging**

England, late 17th century  
Foundation: linen warp and  
cotton weft, 1/2 twill.  
Stitches using crewel wool:  
satin, surface satin, stem,  
detached chain, knots,  
running, cross and  
couching. Height: 90  
inches. Width: 35 inches  
Gift of Elizabeth B. Willis,  
1955-123-1



embroidery with deflected element work to create a wide range of sheer to opaque areas.

A length of cream silk embroidered with a repeat of landscapes dominated by large flowering plants (Figure 15) is in the same style as brocaded silks of the 1730's. The length clearly demonstrates its relationship to silk patterns. However, the motifs number more than could be included in a woven repeat of a similar scale.

The largest group of eighteenth century professional embroideries in the Museum are articles for men, the majority from the Greenleaf collection. There are eight coats, three suits, eighty-five waistcoats and sixty-five merchants' samples for coats and waistcoats. There are also more than two hundred gouache designs on paper. Each pattern has an individual character although many are confined to a specific format and style of repeating natural and fantastic flowers. One becomes curious about the personality and taste of the man who ordered a waistcoat with a lower border of turkeys, cows or roosters (1962-54-30), monkeys drinking and singing (Figure 16), silver ships (1962-54-29), a man wearing a Chinese style hat in a boat with ostrich feathers (1962-54-56) or scenes from the 1785 opera *Dido and Aeneas* by Piccini and Marmontel (1962-54-47).

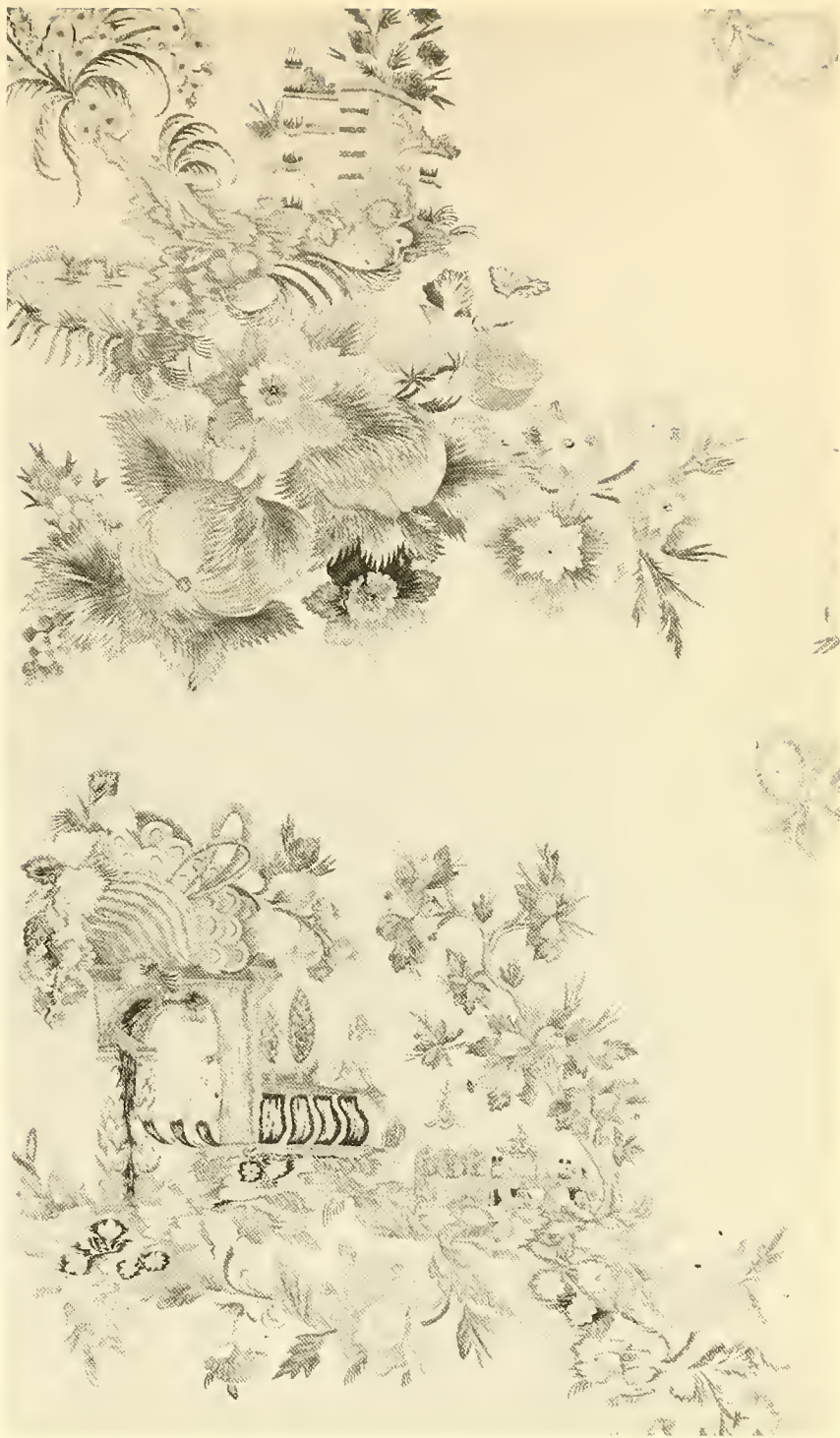
Perhaps the first pattern book to include color notes with motifs and indications of how forms could be rendered three-dimensionally was published by Johann Friedrich Netto in Leipzig in 1795. The first engraved page of motifs is accompanied by a silk fabric, embroidered in colored silks, following the outline of the printed sheet. After the introductory text, each pattern page is included twice, the first hand colored and the second uncolored. Diagrams of stitches did not appear in published pattern books in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but a few are shown in the eighteenth century, as in the Diderot *Encyclopedie*, completed in 1765.

The basic element of embroidery—the stitch, knowledge of which was taken for granted in previous centuries—had to be re-taught on an elementary level by the end of the eighteenth century. In the early nineteenth century, young women used surprisingly few stitches, mainly satin and stem, in their embroidered exercises of pastoral scenes, maps and mourning pictures. Large areas of the foundation fabric were not embroidered but were painted for sky, grass and human features.

**15. Dress Fabric**

France, 1730's

Foundation: silk, plain  
weave patterned with floats  
of a supplementary warp.  
Satin and stem stitches  
using silk Height: 40  
inches. Width, selvedge to  
selvedge: 22 inches  
Purchase in memory of  
Mary Hearn Greims,  
1950-16-1



“Fame Adorning Shakespeare’s Tomb,” after a painting by Angelica Kauffman (1974-100-12), was a favorite in English schools and had its counterpart in the United States in “Fame Adorning the Tomb of Washington” (1974-100-15).

Early in the nineteenth century when the clean lines of the classical style were in vogue for dresses and furnishings, decoration was limited to borders and trimmings. These were woven and printed as well as embroidered. White muslin dresses and curtains were particularly suited to embroidery with small-scale all-over patterns and borders, usually in white. The hook for chain stitch, illustrated in the Diderot *Encyclopedie*, made work much faster and was increasingly used. In the first fifteen years of the century a sense of integrity in design and workmanship was carried over from the eighteenth century. However, the tremendous economic, social and political changes which took place between 1776 and 1815 had their effect on embroidery. The large-scale machine production of white cotton fabric and yarn contributed to the popularity of white work. The growing market for white-on-white embroideries was supplied by a network of cottage industries, particularly in England and Scotland. Patterns were handed out to women, who were paid to embroider them. Embroidery machines began to reach their full potential in mid-century. The dictates of fashion caused frequent shifts in the emphasizing effect of embroidery from skirt to collar to parasol. The fast and extreme changes in fashion often demanded new applications of materials such as fabrics, lace, beads, ribbons and feathers. In contrast to the eighteenth century when styles evolved gracefully and professional designers were able to create personalized patterns for individual customers, the nineteenth century was a jumble of fast-moving commercial forces in which the individual had only a small voice.

The final blow to creative domestic embroidery was the introduction of printed patterns on squared paper in Berlin in 1804. Women took quickly to this commercial venture covering practically everything with “Berlin wool-work,” from suspenders, slippers, chair seats and backs, to fire screens and valances. Between 1810 and 1840, 14,000 patterns were published. The enormous number of patterns gave an illusion of creativity. Fabrics with mesh in different degrees of openness were specially woven to facilitate a simple

## **16. Untailored Man’s Waistcoat**

*France, 1790’s  
Foundation: silk, 8-harness satin. Satin, stem and knot stitches using silk. The sheet music is painted.  
Height: 25½ inches. Width, selvedge to selvedge: 22 inches*

*Bequest of Richard C. Greenleaf in memory of his mother, Adeline Emma Greenleaf, 1962-54-31*



transfer of pattern from color squares on paper to the open mesh of the fabric. A fire screen with a parrot and flowers in cross and pile stitch, using the bright but nonlustrous "Berlin" wools (Figure 17) represents the fully three-dimensional effects achieved. In an effort to keep abreast of new designs the wool-work sampler, embroidered by an adult, was restored to its sixteenth century function of a record of colorful patterns for easy reference (1942-45-2).

With a new leisure class anxious to express itself, a wide range of handwork was illustrated and described in books and periodicals late in the nineteenth century. There were specific directions for knitting, crochet, tufting, appliqué, bead work, ribbon embroidery, and many other techniques using a variety of materials such as wax, paper, paints and shells. Patterns appeared that were suitable for the series of period-style revivals—Gothic, Baroque and Renaissance. Due to this interest many of the German and Italian sixteenth and seventeenth century pattern books were reprinted between 1875 and 1910. No doubt the most bizarre revival of Renaissance Italian embroidery, lace techniques and patterns was achieved by Sybil Carter, an Episcopalian deaconess from Maine. In the 1890's, she organized a home industry among various North American Indian tribes with a sales shop in New York City (1943-44-1 through 16).

The loss of vital craft traditions and the deterioration of design as a result of mass production and acceptance of period revivals became the primary concern of a group of men in England in the 1850's. One of the leaders of the Arts and Crafts Movement, as it became known, was William Morris (1834-1896) who designed embroideries in the style of the pre-Raphaelites for his home "Red House" outside London. His designs were embroidered by his family and friends. The design and sale of embroidery patterns as well as completed pieces became an important activity of the company he founded in 1861. The three pillows in the collection were probably designed by or under the direction of Morris's daughter, May. One may have been embroidered by May Morris herself (1975-19-1); the second was purchased from Morris & Co. as a fully made-up pillow (Figure 18); the third was purchased as a kit complete with patterned fabric and yarn and was embroidered in New York (1936-5-3).



**17. Fire Screen**

United States, 1830-50  
Foundation: silk-wrapped  
cotton, plain weave (Berlin  
canvas). Counted cross  
stitch and pile loops using  
wool. Height: 28 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches.  
Width 21 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches  
Gift of Mrs. Edgar  
Auchincloss, 1947-34-1



The continental art style, "Art Nouveau," expanded upon English ideas. The Museum is fortunate in having six embroideries for personal use designed by Hector Guimard (1867-1942), the leading French architect in this style. The fabrics include a collar and a panel for a dress which he designed for Adeline Oppenheimer to wear at their wedding in 1909 (Figure 19).

The *Encyclopedia of Needlework* published in France by Therese de Dillmont in 1880 and Caulfield and Seward's *Dictionary of Needlework* published in England in 1882 presented dozens of techniques with clear diagrams and directions that anyone could follow. The number of styles and patterns available to the non-professional embroiderer in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be appreciated by a random review of the ladies' magazines of the period.

In the twentieth century, the practice of embroidery was interrupted by two major wars. A casual glance at the periodicals of the time reveals that knitting and crochet occupied many hands and were used to make warm mittens and sweaters for men at the front. In countries where national costumes were embroidered, such as in Central Europe and Scandinavia, embroidery survived severe shocks.

In the United States, one of the most influential teachers to rise out of the chaos of the twentieth century was the Hungarian-born Mariska Karasz (1898-1960). With traditional training and years of experience behind her, she taught her students to become aware of the movement and character of each stitch and to learn to use stitches to express the line and mass of a pattern. Her embroideries in the collection, of which the best known is "Calla Lilly" (Figure 20), clearly show that in her approach to embroidery, design is far more important than expensive materials or minute and carefully repeated stitches.

Gradually, since about 1950, interest in embroidery has increased so that today there are thousands of non-professional embroiderers, shops specializing in patterns and needlework supplies and numerous active guilds. Contemporary embroidery emphasizes designs drawn from the present. While both commercial designers and non-professional embroiderers often draw inspiration from the world around them, museum collections continue to make the traditions of the past accessible to everyone.

Milton Sondag and Gillian Moss

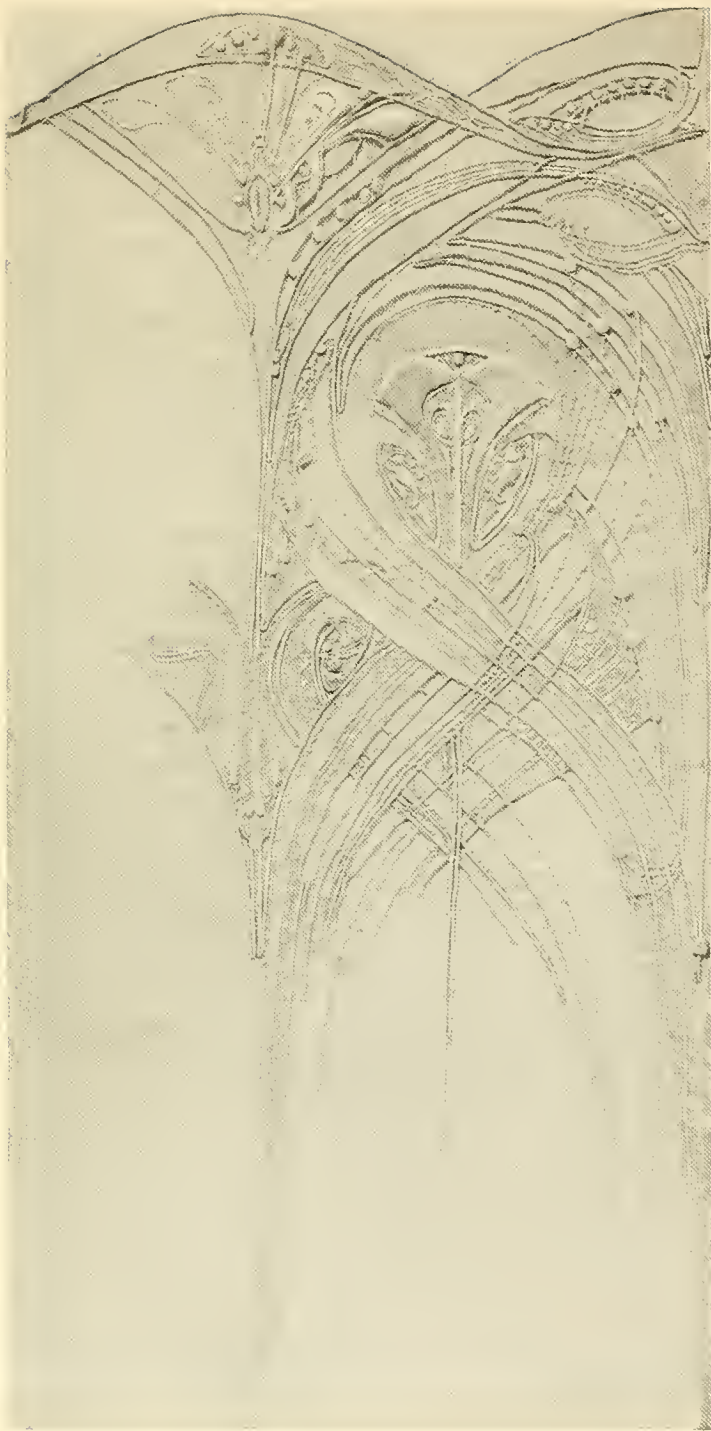
## 18. Pillow Cover

*Designed and embroidered by William Morris & Co. London, England, about 1900*

*Foundation: two layers of plain weave cotton, the bottom layer loosely woven. Stitches using mercerized cotton: running/darning, stem, couching and laid work over surface satin. Height: 21 inches. Width: 21½ inches.*

*Gift of Annie May Hegeman, 1944-71-6*





**19. Panel for a  
Dress (unfinished)**

*Designed by Hector  
Guimard (1876-1942) for  
his wife Adeline  
Oppenheimer*

*Paris, France, 1909*

*Foundation: silk, sheer plain  
weave. Stitches using silk:  
chain with a hook, stem,  
satin, padded satin and knot  
(chain stitch used as  
padding for satin stitch).*

*Height: 27 inches. Width:*

*11 1/2 inches*

*Gift of Mm. Hector Guimard,  
1949-91-3*

**20. Calla Lily**

Designed and embroidered  
by Mariska Karasz (1898-  
1960)

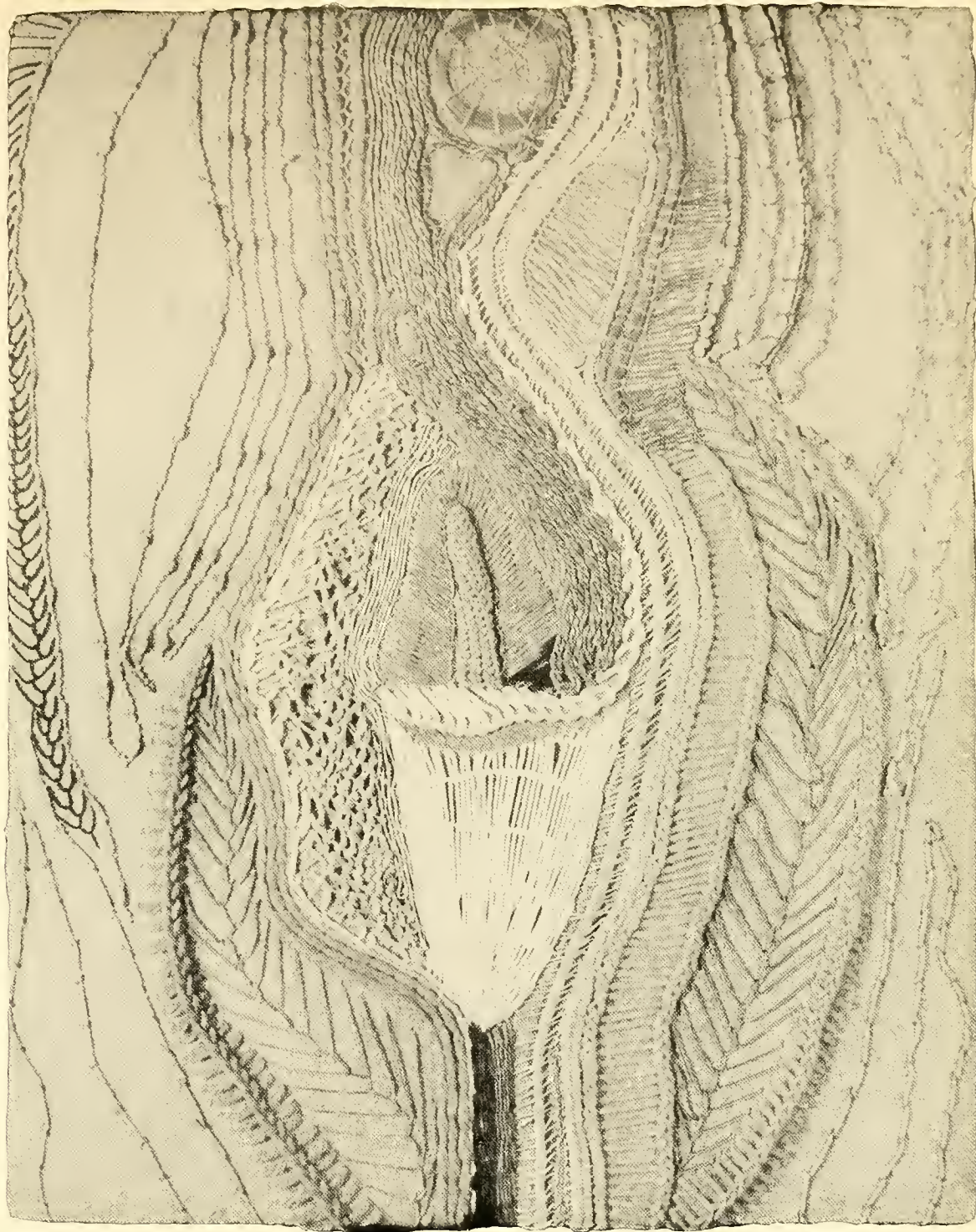
United States, 1951

Foundation: silk, plain  
weave textured by crinkled  
yarn. Stitches using cotton,  
wool and synthetics:  
couching, ladder chain,  
feather, raised stem,  
knotted detached looping,  
stem and cretan.

Height: 22 inches. Width:

16½ inches

Gift of Elizabeth Gordon,  
1964-24-38



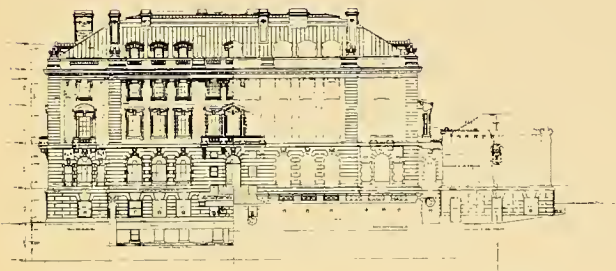
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